

Developing Empathy by Learning a Native Language: Adopting Quechua to Educate T-shaped Engineers

Universidad de Ingeniería y Tecnología

Lima, Perú

Out of the 47 native languages that are spoken in Peru, 21 will be imminently extinct.

An experiment...

We started teaching Quechua at UTEC in 2017-1

At first we didn't know what to expect because of...many reasons:

- Quechua culture has been discriminated against for centuries
- Racist practices in Peru target Andean communities (who are mostly Quechua)
- We didn't know how motivated students were about indigenous languages



1.5 years later...

While learning a new language, this course has become a platform...

On a personal level:

For students to approach the(ir) Quechua identity

For students to familiarize with the various Quechua narratives that have developed in time (rural/urban Quechua)

On an academic level:

For students to get a closer look to IT projects related to disseminating, documenting and preserving the language

For students to explore the social and technical challenges related to these projects

A student once told me

"My grandparents came to Lima from the Andes 30 years ago. Their mother language is Quechua but they never spoke Quechua with me because it would make them feel embarrassed. Somehow, the fact that I'm learning Quechua at university made them feel that being Quechua is now socially accepted. You should see how my grandma smiles and laughs every time I start mumbling words in Quechua. It makes me happy."

#Goals:

- Provide students with a safe space to reclaim and explore their Quechua identity
- Approach Quechua studies from an academic perspective
- Facilitate experiences to bring our community closer to the Andean worldview
- Develop a transdisciplinary study group oriented to protect and document Peruvian intangible heritage

Teaching native languages is a tool for citizenship building that is free from discrimination. Teaching native languages is a powerful tool to help build bridges among individuals that are part of an ethnically diverse society.